

Bibliometric Coloniality in South Africa: Critical Review of the Indexes of Accredited Journals

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Abstract

Bibliometric coloniality refers to the system of domination of global academic publishing by bibliometric indexes based in the Global North, which serve as gatekeepers of academic relevance, credibility, and quality. These indexes are dominated by journals from Europe and North America. Due to bibliometric coloniality, scholarly platforms and academic research from the African continent and much of the Global South are largely invisible on the global stage. In this article, we analyse the geographic coverage of five international indexes that are part of the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) lists of accredited journals in South Africa, and unpack systemic and structural factors behind the DHET's choices. Our analysis shows that the DHET's lists of accredited journals propagate and value academic journals based in the Global North as credible platforms for dissemination of knowledge, while erasing the African continent and Global South. This way, the DHET is directly reinforcing global bibliometric coloniality and contributing to the maintenance of Euro-American epistemic hegemony. We argue that South Africa, as Africa's top producer of scholarly output, should lead the process of dismantling bibliometric coloniality and promoting African knowledge platforms. Working closely with other African countries and the African Union on the creation of an African scholarly index would be the first step in this process. However, neoliberalisation of higher education and the lack of political will to tackle coloniality of knowledge are preventing this from happening.

Keywords: bibliometric coloniality; coloniality; neoliberalism; epistemic decolonisation; decoloniality; higher education; research; South Africa



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Introduction

Research, knowledge production, and dissemination of scholarship and knowledge are key sites of the struggle for epistemic decolonisation and plurality. The struggle is often between the attempts to maintain the Euro-American epistemic domination, and the resistance in the quest for decolonisation by progressive scholars from the Global South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021; Tuhiwai Smith 1999) and from other parts of the world. Production, validation, and dissemination of academic knowledge are inherently political and economic processes, determined and shaped by powerful forces involved in them (Soler, Erdocia, and Savski 2023). Academic journals, as the main platforms for dissemination of scholarly research, are not epistemically neutral; instead, they are situated geographically (Abimbola 2023) and in terms of the disciplines and their aims, the composition of editorial boards, and/or the worldviews and ideologies that led to their creation, and that continue to be propagated and maintained through their dissemination of knowledge.

In this article, we build on the concept “bibliometric coloniality” introduced by Mills et al. (2023). By bibliometric coloniality, they refer to the system of domination of global academic publishing by a handful of corporations that own powerful commercial bibliometric indexes, which serve as gatekeepers of academic relevance, credibility, and quality. For the most part, these and other smaller non-commercial indexes are controlled by corporations, academic bodies, and scholars from the Global North, who set the rules, norms, and standards of the “game”. These indexes are also dominated by academic journals based in the Global North. At the same time, the majority of African academic journals—and most of the journals from other parts of the Global South—are excluded from these indexes. This way, knowledge produced on the African continent and published in African journals is diminished and remains largely invisible on a global stage. This places African scholars and scholarship on the margins of global academic publishing (Mills et al. 2023).

The term “bibliometric coloniality” is linked to the concept of “coloniality”, which refers to “colonial-like power relations” that continue to exist long after the formal end of colonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015, 487). Coloniality is a “power structure that affects various aspects of the lives of [formerly] colonised subjects, including their ways of knowing, seeing and imagining the world” (Ndlovu 2018, 99). The purpose of coloniality is to extract and exploit resources, wealth, power, and knowledge from Africa and the rest of the Global South in service of the Global North’s geopolitical, economic, and knowledge-based domination and hegemony (Kessi, Marks, and Ramugondo 2020). Here, the global academic publishing industry, dominated by publishers, bibliometric indexes, and journals from the Global North, plays a key role in gatekeeping, extraction, and assigning of credibility and relevance to some knowledges, knowledge producers, and knowledge platforms, while sidelining and erasing others (Abimbola 2023; Bol et al. 2023; Mills et al. 2023). The purpose of all this is the maintenance of the Euro-American epistemic hegemony and the Global

North's narrow frames for seeing, imagining, and interpreting the world (Mbembe 2016).

Our focus in this article is on the systemic, structural, and policy-related factors and choices that contribute to the maintenance of bibliometric coloniality in South Africa. In many formerly colonised countries, bibliometric coloniality has been maintained by global power structures, systems, dynamics, influences, imbalances, and actors (Mills et al. 2023). While these are important factors in South Africa, the maintenance of bibliometric coloniality in the country has primarily been the work of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). Publishing in academic journals by academics and researchers affiliated with South African public universities is guided by the DHET's annual lists of accredited journals. The lists contain large commercial indexes based in Europe—Scopus and Web of Science, the Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series and Publishers (the Norwegian list), the United Kingdom-based International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), and the Swedish-based Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Apart from the two South Africa-specific lists—Scientific Electronic Library Online South Africa (SciELO SA) and the DHET's list of South African journals—no African or Global South indexes, directories, or platforms are part of the DHET's lists of accredited journals where South African academics are expected to publish their research (DHET n.d.). By requiring academics and researchers to publish in a small number of South African journals or journals largely based in the Global North, the DHET is directly promoting bibliometric coloniality. This way, the DHET is also devaluing the credibility and visibility of many long-established African scholarly journals (based outside South Africa) (Mills et al. 2023) and journals based elsewhere in the Global South, reinforcing global bibliometric coloniality and contributing to the maintenance of Euro-American epistemic hegemony.

Previous research has explored South Africa's academic publishing (ASSAf 2019; Mills et al. 2023), the quality of South Africa's research output (Mouton et al. 2019), and the country's research policies, practices, and incentives (Muller 2017; Muthama and McKenna 2020; Tomaselli 2018; Vaughan 2008). In addition, Asubiaro, Onaolapo, and Mills (2024) have written about regional disparities in the journal coverage in Scopus and Web of Science, highlighting the exclusion of many non-English language and Global South journals from these indexes. However, there is a lack of research about the extent of the domination of the DHET's lists by journals from the Global North. Focusing on the geographic location of academic journals is important as the location represents the historical and contemporary patterns and norms (Bol et al. 2023) of colonial and neocolonial domination and exploitation, on one side, and subjugation, extractivism, and erasure, on the other. In this exploratory article, we conduct an analysis of the geographic coverage of each of the five Europe-based bibliometric indexes and directories that are part of the DHET's lists of accredited journals. Our article is framed within the decolonial framework. This allows us to ascertain and visualise parts of the world that are propagated and valued as credible and relevant spaces or regions for dissemination of knowledge, and parts of the world that are

neglected and sidelined. We also engage in a critical discussion about the reasons behind the DHET's policy choices and the implications of the DHET's complicity in the maintenance of bibliometric coloniality and Euro-American epistemic hegemony for the decolonial project and the broader intra-Africa and South-South research collaboration by South African universities. The article is structured as follows: The next section will review the relevant literature. This will be followed by a discussion of the methodology. The next section will present the data and findings about the DHET's lists of accredited journals. We will follow this with a critical discussion of the findings. The last section will present conclusions and recommendations.

Literature Review

Coloniality and Knowledge Production

Forms of colonial and neocolonial domination, particularly when it comes to education and production and dissemination of knowledge, continue unabated in most parts of the world (Sardar 2008). Structural domination, Eurocentric epistemic hegemony, and racism by former colonial powers, their settler colonies, and the contemporary neocolonial hegemons exist in different shapes and forms in higher education and in the control of knowledge production and dissemination globally. Sardar adds that the dominant global research and knowledge production structures, systems, and platforms are “products of a culture which sees itself hierarchically at the top of the ladder of civilization; they postulate all that the world contains and all that the world has produced and produces, is by and for the white man” (Sardar 2008, xvi). Academic publishing, as a key structure for dissemination of scholarly knowledge, is centred in Europe and the United States and reflects the historical norms and patterns (Bol et al. 2023) developed over the centuries of the European colonial project, and the Euro-American coloniality and neocolonialism over the past seven decades. Asubiaro, Onaolapo, and Mills (2024, 1484) add that the “global landscape of journal publishing is shaped by history, empire and regional income inequalities. The dominant position of Europe and North America within this research economy is amplified” through the continued overrepresentation of these regions in major global bibliometric indexes at the expense of other parts of the world. Bol et al. (2023, 2) note that “this is by design, not default”. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) adds that the purpose of these structures is to maintain the underlying systems and patterns of exclusion, extraction, and domination that have been established during colonial rule.

Asubiaro and Onaolapo (2023, 746) see the Web of Science and Scopus as the “most authoritative global research indexing databases”, and as “critical components of the current global research ecosystem”. However, they also warn that these dominant indexes are not truly global. Instead, they are dominated by journals from Europe and the United States, and largely index scholarly research published in the English language. At the same time, Web of Science and Scopus are “systematically and structurally biased against research produced” in most parts of the Global South and in languages other than English (Asubiaro and Onaolapo 2023; see also Asubiaro,

Onaolapo, and Mills 2024). Most other smaller Europe-based indexes are also dominated by journals based in the Global North. This way, academic publishing continues to reinforce the Euro-American-centric epistemic hegemony (Tennant 2020). Collyer (2018) argues that structural and systemic domination by the Global North and erasure of the Global South in the academic publishing industry and bibliometric indexes directly contribute to the maintenance of coloniality, global inequalities, and epistemic injustices rooted in colonial conquest, subjugation, and exploitation of much of the world by European colonial powers. Tennant (2020, 2) adds that the exclusion of the African continent and Global South from these indexes “dictates what we read, what we value, and we build upon. This in turn discriminates against the contexts of knowledge generation in those places, including invaluable cultural perspectives.” This, in essence, is what bibliometric coloniality is and what it does.

As part of the coloniality of knowledge production and dissemination, the Euro-American domination of academic publishing can be observed in different fields of study and the research and knowledge production structures globally. In the field of economics, scholarly publishing about Africa is dominated by white scholars based in the Global North. Only about 15% of articles about Africa in leading journals based in the Global North are authored by scholars from the continent as authors or lead authors. The same exclusion of African scholars can be seen in the composition of editorial boards of leading economics journals. These “international” journals are dominated by scholars from the Global North, including the journals that focus on the African continent. In journals where around one third of the articles are about the African continent, only about 3% of editorial board members are from the continent. Even the Global North-based economics journals with “Africa” in the title of the journals, such as the *African Economic History* and *Journal of African Economies*, have only 7% and 14% of editorial board members based on the African continent, respectively (Chelwa 2021). While we provide an example about economics here, similar systemic and structural trends and patterns of domination by white scholars, editors, and editorial board members from the Global North have been observed in the fields of politics and international relations (Briggs and Weathers 2016), public health (Abimbola 2019; Mbaye et al. 2019), and African Studies (Kessi, Marks, and Ramugondo 2020; Mama 2007; Mkandawire 1997).

Coloniality in South African Higher Education

Centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid have had a profound impact on South African higher education. Over centuries of systemic and structural institutionalised racism in all spheres of life, white supremacist and Eurocentric knowledges, worldviews, and ways of knowing were imposed and promoted, and African knowledges and worldviews were undermined (Heleta 2018; Mbembe 2016; Modiri 2021; Ramose 2016). After the apartheid-era academic isolation and boycotts, which forced white-dominated academia in South Africa to focus primarily on local collaboration and publishing in local journals, as well as limited collaboration and engagement with some countries in the Global North (Boshoff 2010; Onyancha 2011;

Sooryamoorthy 2010), in the post-apartheid period universities have oriented themselves towards the expansion of international scholarly engagement (Boshoff 2010; Heleta and Jithoo 2023a; Muller 2017). This, however, has entailed largely research and epistemic engagements and collaborations with the Global North while neglecting the African continent and much of the Global South (Heleta and Jithoo 2023a; Maringe and Ojo 2017; Onyancha 2011; Sooryamoorthy 2019). In particular, historically white universities continue to neglect research collaboration with the African continent and the rest of the Global South, focusing overwhelmingly on collaboration with Europe and North America (Heleta and Jithoo 2023b). Similarly, in post-apartheid South Africa, universities have continued to privilege Euro-American knowledges and perspectives as universal knowledges and ways of knowing (Heleta 2018; Mbembe 2016; Modiri 2021; Ramose 2016).

After 1994, instead of focusing on epistemic decolonisation and redress after centuries of white supremacist oppression and rule, the South African government chose neoliberalisation of the economy. This also included the neoliberalisation of higher education and incorporation of South African universities into the “global knowledge economy” (Heleta 2023; Kamola 2016). This, in many ways, shifted the priorities of universities from epistemic decolonisation and social justice to commodification and commercialisation (Mabasa 2017). Driven by the “neoliberal productivity imperatives” promoted by the DHET (Tomaselli 2018, 2), academics and researchers are expected to publish their research in academic journals, books, and conference proceedings. As in most other neoliberal higher education systems, “publish or perish” is a daily reality and pressure in South African academia. Scholarly publications in accredited journals are key factors for academics building their careers and seeking promotions (Carnelley 2015; Collyer 2018; Mills et al. 2023; Mouton et al. 2019; Muller 2017; Muthama and McKenna 2020; Sooryamoorthy 2019; Tomaselli 2018). In addition, the DHET pays subsidies to universities for each publication unit, which in 2020 amounted to 130,249 South African Rand (Essop 2020). When it comes to journal articles, subsidies are only paid for publications in journals that are on the DHET’s lists of accredited journals (DHET 2015; Tomaselli 2019). The subsidies paid for research outputs are one of the key sources of research funding for universities and academics (DHET 2023; Essop 2020; Tomaselli 2018).

The DHET’s *Research Outputs Policy* (2015, 4) highlights that its aim is to “encourage research productivity by rewarding quality research output” at public universities. The DHET’s lists of accredited journals are key tools used by the government to communicate with institutions, academics, and researchers regarding what constitutes a quality platform for publication of scholarly research. The DHET uses international indexes and directories as proxies to determine the quality of journals where scholars publish. This is primarily due to the department’s lack of capacity to do in-house quality assurance and control of scholarly publishing (Carnelley 2015). Universities are responsible to ensure that their academics and researchers publish research according to the *Research Outputs Policy* requirements, particularly when it comes to journal indexes

and lists that are accredited and issued by the DHET. Scholarly output that does not meet the DHET's requirements cannot be submitted by universities for subsidies (DHET 2023). As noted above, the DHET's lists, updated and issued annually, currently contain two South African and five international indexes, directories, and lists of accredited journals. By only recognising and financially rewarding publications in journals that appear on its lists, the DHET implies that the journals that are not part of its lists are not credible platforms for publication of scholarly output, and that scholarly output published outside the DHET's guidelines communicated via its lists is not a quality research output (Tomaselli 2019). It is important to note that the 2015 *Research Outputs Policy* has not introduced these aims, priorities, funding mechanisms, and restrictions. To a large extent, this policy is a continuation of past policies and practices (Masinde and Coetzee 2021; Muller 2017; Muthama and McKenna 2020). The apartheid government invested heavily in white higher education, science and research in order to build capacity for the maintenance of the apartheid project, ensure the competitiveness of South African science on the global scale, and try and remedy the impact of international boycotts and isolation (Beinart and Dubow 2021). Providing incentives to scholars for publishing research output was part of this strategy. Tomaselli (2018) notes that the apartheid government developed specific policies for financially incentivising scholarly output at universities in the early 1980s, and these have been expanded in the post-apartheid period.

The DHET's financial incentives for publication of scholarly output have led to a significant growth in publications. In 2005, South African public universities produced 7,230 accredited publication units (journal articles, chapters, books, or conference proceedings); in 2021, this figure stood at 23,416 (DHET 2023). Muller (2017, 66) argues that the DHET's incentives and subsidies have created a "system founded on rent seeking, which is antithetical to socially valuable intellectual inquiry". Vaughan (2008) writes that the DHET's funding subsidies are impacting the behaviour and choices of academics and researchers, particularly in cases where academics receive portions of subsidies into their personal research accounts or even into their own bank accounts, as is the case at some institutions. To this, we would add that the DHET's lists of accredited journals also have a direct impact on the academics' and researchers' choices regarding the journals they consider for publication of their research. They rely heavily on these lists due to the financial incentive that the institutions receive from the DHET for each publication in an accredited journal, and which many institutions split with authors (Carnelley 2015; Muthama and McKenna 2020).

While many African journals outside South Africa have been in existence for decades and are credible, relevant, and quality platforms for dissemination of scholarly research (Asubiario and Onaolapo 2023), these journals are not part of the DHET's lists and are not recommended as credible platforms for publication of scholarly output produced by academics and researchers in South Africa (Tomaselli 2019). The underrepresentation of African journals outside South Africa in the DHET's lists of accredited journals directly undermines and diminishes African scholarly platforms (Mills et al. 2023), as

well as the journals from most other parts of the Global South, many of which are also excluded from the dominant indexes and directories. It also forces researchers and scholars affiliated with South African universities to make a choice “between decolonial principles and career pragmatism” (Asubiaro and Onaolapo 2023, 756). This is contrary to the rhetoric in post-apartheid higher education and other policy documents, which have called for the expansion of collaboration with the African continent and the Global South, and in particular the promotion and advancement of scholarly research in Africa (DHET 2013b; DoE 1997; DST 2019).

In 2013, the ministerial committee for the review of the funding of South African universities proposed the addition of the Scopus index and SciELO platform to the DHET list of accredited journals, which at the time contained the DHET’s list of South African journals and the Web of Science and IBSS indexes. The argument behind this was the need to broaden the number of accredited journals where academics and researchers can publish their research, and to reward research excellence and quality (DHET 2013a). Following this recommendation, Scopus was added to the DHET’s list in 2016. In terms of SciELO, only the SciELO South African list was added in 2016, while other parts of the network in Latin America and the Caribbean were excluded. In addition, the Norwegian list was also added in 2016, while the DOAJ was added in 2021 (DHET 2023). Analysis of research output trends by the DHET (2023) shows that publishing in Scopus- and Web of Science-indexed journals is a preferred choice for scholars and academics in South Africa, with a significantly lower proportion of output published in the journals on the DOAJ, DHET, SciELO, IBSS, and Norwegian lists.

Methodology

In this exploratory article, we rely on publicly available data about bibliometric indexes, directories, and platforms used by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training to communicate its preferences or expectations regarding the academic journals where academics and researchers affiliated with the country’s public universities are expected to publish their scholarly research. The DHET’s lists of accredited journals, as they are commonly known, are published on the DHET’s website annually as Excel documents with a number of tabs, each representing a different list of journals, or a different index, directory, or platform. In 2023, the list of accredited journals contained the DHET’s own list of 282 South African journals and the SciELO South Africa platform that contained 93 journals. Apart from these South Africa-specific lists, five other lists currently part of the DHET’s list of accredited journals were European-based bibliometric indexes or directories (DHET n.d.).

Our aim in this article is to critically analyse the DHET’s international lists of accredited journals in order to ascertain parts of the world that the lists propagate and value as credible and relevant spaces or regions for dissemination of knowledge, and parts of the world that the lists neglect and sideline. As the two South African lists contain only local journals, our analysis does not focus on these lists; our focus is on the five European-based indexes and directories. In particular, we are interested in the

geographic location of the journals in these lists in order to ascertain the geographic reach or coverage that the DHET's lists of accredited journals represent and promote. We are able to do this as the Web of Science, IBSS, DOAJ and Norwegian lists contain the data about the countries where the journals are located. While the Scopus list does not contain the country data, we rely on the data from Elsevier, the parent company of Scopus, and its data from March 2023 about the geographic coverage of the journals indexed in Scopus (Elsevier 2023). It is important to note that the publicly available Scopus geographic coverage information provides only the information about different regions of the world where the journals are based, including the conflation of the African continent and the Middle East. To get the specific data about the number of journals from Africa indexed in Scopus, we communicated with the Scopus representatives via email and received a breakdown of geographic coverage for Africa and the Middle East in 2023 (Personal communication, 20 July 2023). The data presented below is part of the DHET's 2023/2024 list, which was the latest DHET's list of accredited journals at the time of writing. Our detailed analysis of the data was conducted in Excel.

Findings and Data Analysis

Web of Science

The Web of Science 2023 list that is part of the DHET's list of accredited journals contains 14,950 academic journals. Figure 1 presents the breakdown of the top 10 countries where the journals are located. The journals based in the United States dominate the Web of Science list (39.64% of all journals), followed by the United Kingdom (24.76%), the Netherlands (8.45%), and Germany (5.89%). The top 10 countries represent 87.97% of all journals indexed in the Web of Science. Outside the top 10, 66 other countries represented in the Web of Science index contribute 12.03%, or 1,799 journals. In terms of the global geographic coverage, 94% of all journals indexed in the Web of Science are located in the Global North, and only 6% are located in the Global South. When it comes to Africa, in 2023, Web of Science had 52 journals based on the continent. Out of these, 41 journals are based in South Africa, 3 in Egypt, 3 in Ethiopia, 2 in Nigeria, 1 in Benin, 1 in Malawi, and 1 in Uganda. All African journals represent only 0.35% of journals indexed in the Web of Science. At the same time, the Web of Science list contains 60 journals about Africa that are located in Europe and the United States. Further interrogation of the Web of Science list shows that Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, also known as the BRICS bloc, which represent around 40% of world's population, are only represented with 531 journals, which is fractionally more than the number of journals from Switzerland.

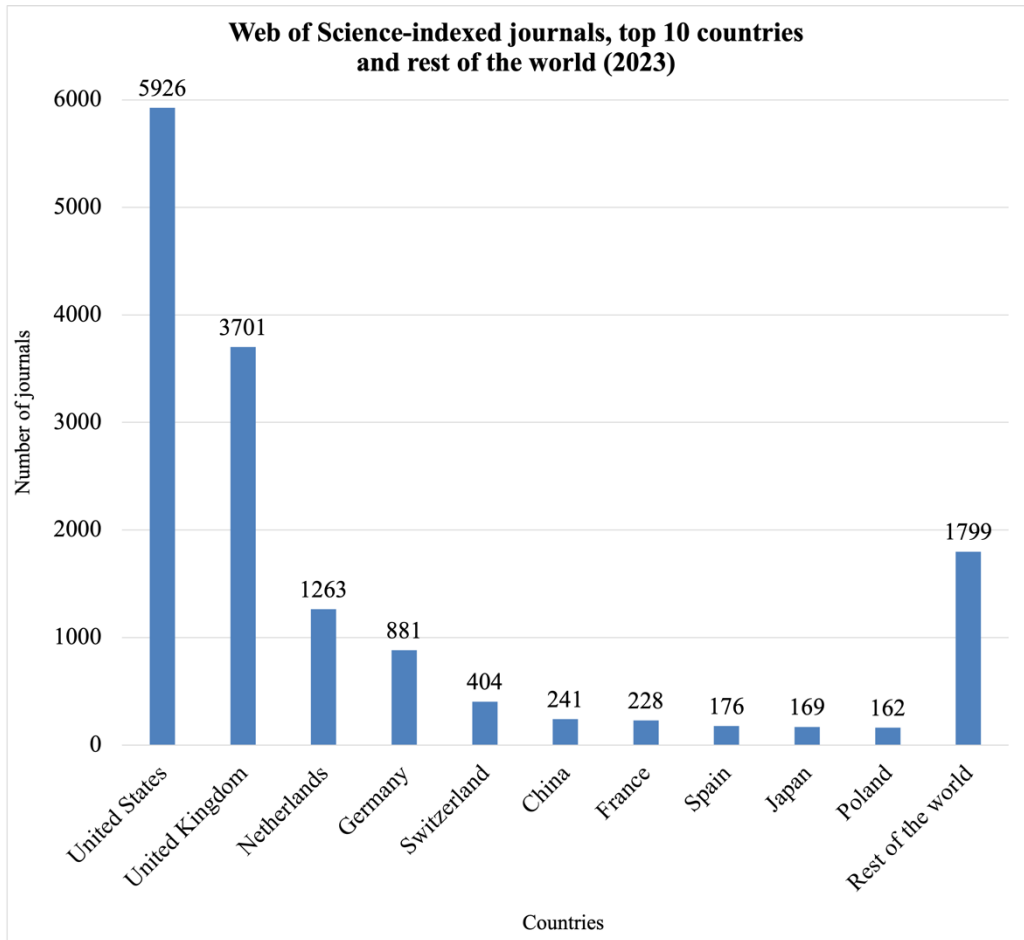


Figure 1: Geographic coverage of journals indexed in Web of Science

Scopus

In 2023, the Scopus index contained 27,952 journals. Figure 2 presents the breakdown of where the journals are located, based on Scopus's own division of world regions. Almost half of journals indexed in Scopus are in Western Europe (49.44%). This is followed by North America (24.93%), Asia Pacific (9.61%), and Eastern Europe (8.16%). The journals from the African continent—341 in total—represent 1.22% of the journals indexed in Scopus (Elsevier 2023). The majority of African journals indexed in Scopus are from South Africa (Asubiaro and Onaolapo 2023; Mills et al. 2023).

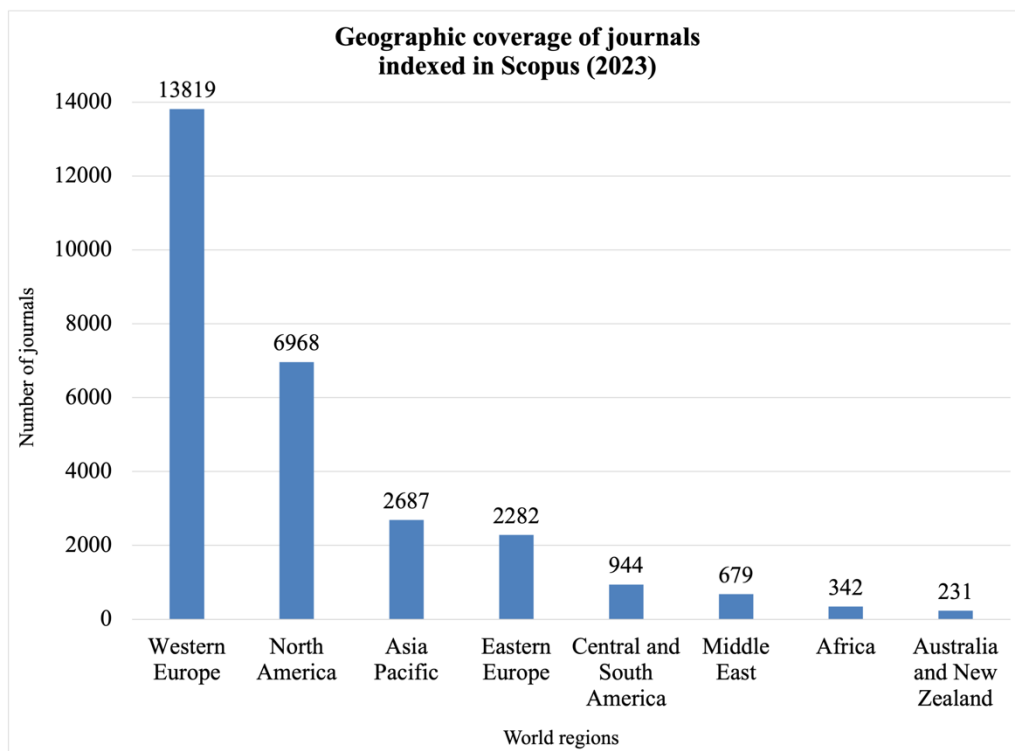


Figure 2: Geographic coverage of journals indexed in Scopus

International Bibliography of the Social Sciences

In 2023, the IBSS list contained 2,188 journals. Figure 3 presents the breakdown of the top 10 countries where the journals are located. Of all journals, 39.26% are based in the United Kingdom, followed by the United States (22.26%), the Netherlands (7.18%), Germany (3.47%), and France (2.65%). All other 57 countries outside the top 10 contribute only 361 journals, or 16.50%. Overall, 89.44% of the journals are based in the Global North, and 10.56% in the Global South. When it comes to Africa, only 1.33% of the journals indexed in the IBSS are from the continent—26 from South Africa and 1 each from Nigeria, Senegal, and Zimbabwe.

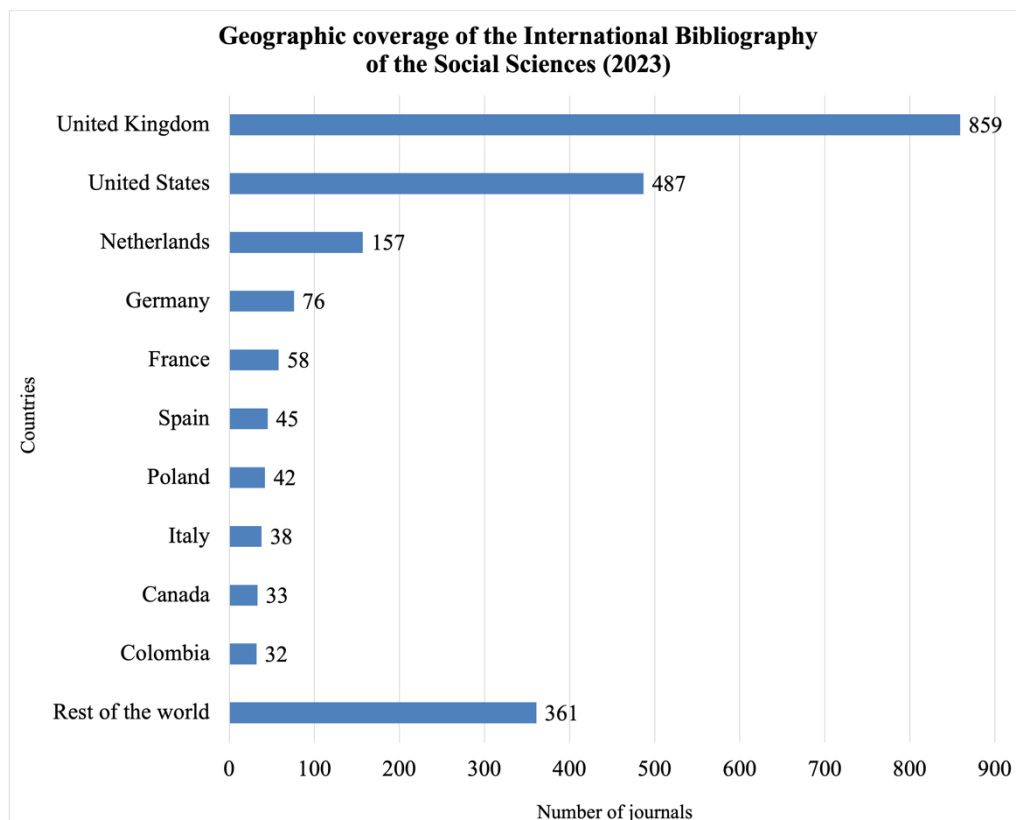


Figure 3: Geographic coverage of journals indexed in IBSS

Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series and Publishers

In 2023, the Norwegian list contained 2,223 journals. It is important to note that the DHET only features Level 2 (high-level journals) from the Norwegian Register on its list of accredited journals.¹ Figure 4 presents the geographic coverage of the journals on the Norwegian Register's Level 2 list. The journals from the United States make up 41.75% of all journals on the Norwegian list, followed by the United Kingdom (30.32%), the Netherlands (14.80%), and Germany (6.48%). Outside the top 10 countries, all of which are in the Global North, all other countries represented in the Norwegian list make up 1.93% of the journals. The Norwegian list that is part of the DHET list of accredited journals does not contain any journals from the African continent. However, 9 journals about Africa, all based in Europe and the United States, are part of this list.

¹ Editorial Note: *Education as Change* is listed on the Norwegian Register as a Level 1 journal. This means that the journal fulfils the "minimum requirements" of entry onto the list. It is unclear why the journal's status has yet not been changed to Level 2.

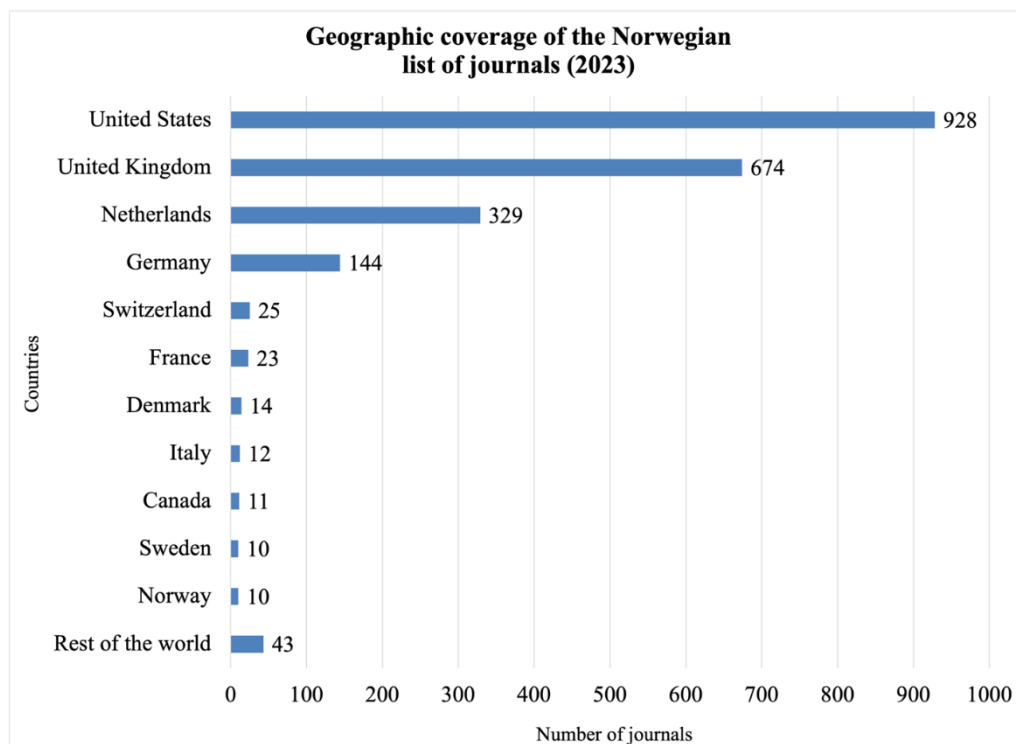


Figure 4: Geographic coverage of the Norwegian list of journals

Directory of Open Access Journals

The DOAJ list contained 18,838 journals in 2023. Figure 5 presents the top 20 countries represented in this list, as well as the number of journals from 112 other countries that have their journals indexed in the DOAJ. While journals from the Global North dominate other lists, this is the most globally diverse list within the DHET's list of accredited journals. The top country where the journals indexed in DOAJ are located is Indonesia (11.67%), followed by the United Kingdom (10.58%), Brazil (8.72%), the United States (5.66%), and Spain (5.07%). Overall, 50.62% of the journals are located in the Global South, while 49.38% are located in the Global North. However, while the DOAJ has a strong representation from some parts of the Global South, this directory contains only 340 journals from Africa, which represents 1.80% of the overall list. It is important to note that more than a third of African journals indexed in the DOAJ are based in South Africa (129 journals). Other African countries represented in the DOAJ include Egypt (86 journals), Morocco (29), Algeria (27), Nigeria (20), Ethiopia (9), Ghana (6), Kenya (6), Libya (5), Tunisia (5), Angola (4), Côte d'Ivoire (3), Democratic Republic of the Congo (3), Cameroon (1), Gambia (1), Malawi (1), Mali (1), Rwanda (1), South Sudan (1), Uganda (1), and Zimbabwe (1).

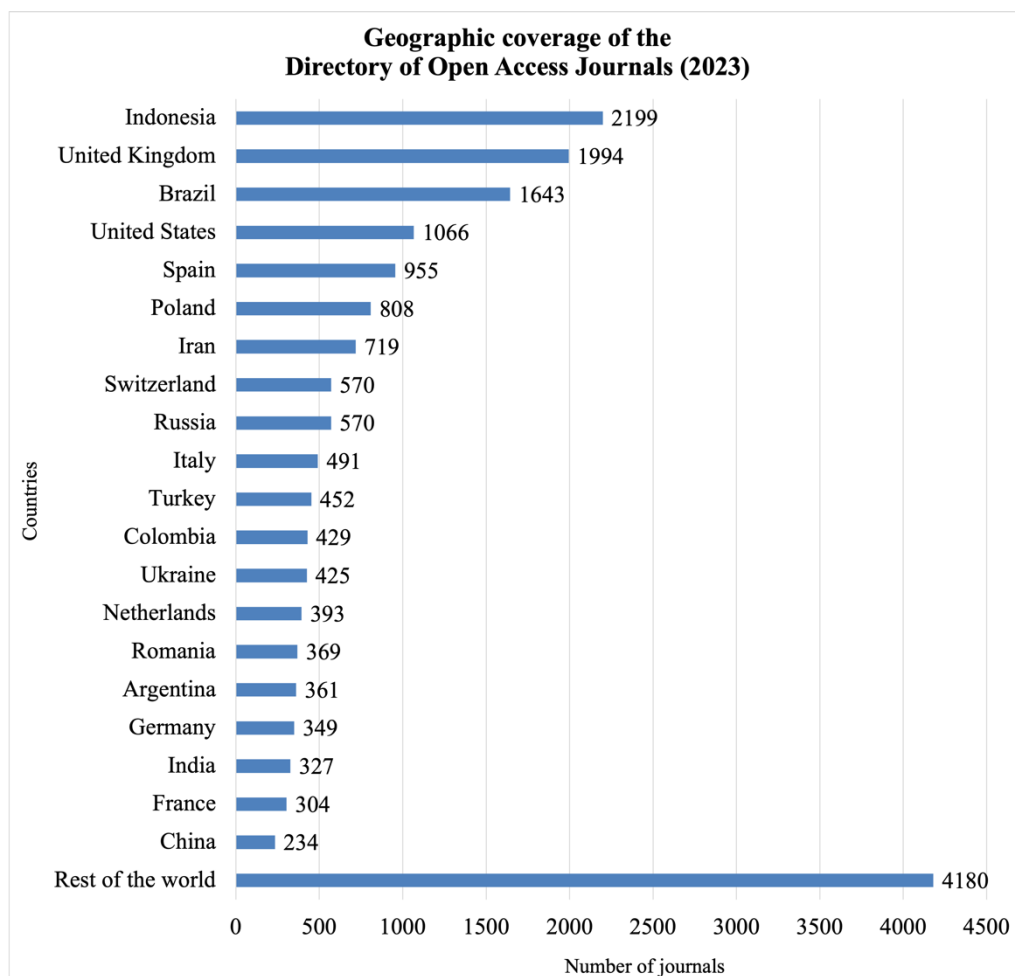


Figure 5: Geographic coverage of journals indexed in the DOAJ

Discussion

As our analysis has shown, the international journal indexes and directories that are part of the DHET's lists of accredited journals are largely dominated by journals from Europe and North America. In the case of Web of Science, 94% of indexed journals are based in the Global North, and a mere 6% in the Global South. Only 52 journals based on the African continent are indexed in the Web of Science. When 41 South African journals are excluded, journals from other African countries make up 0.07% of journals in the Web of Science. Similar domination of the Global North is evident in the analysis of the Scopus data. Almost 75% of the journals indexed in Scopus are based in Western Europe and North America. Because Scopus does not share specific country data for journals it indexes, we do not have a precise figure for the journals from the Global South, but it is evident from the analysis we have presented above that the Global North is overwhelmingly represented, while the journals from the Global South are sidelined. Journals from the African continent make up only 1.22% of journals indexed in Scopus.

While we do not have specific figures for different African countries, research by Asubiaro and Onaolapo (2023) and Mills et al. (2023) indicates that most of the African journals indexed in Scopus are South African journals, meaning that Scopus has a very small representation of African journals outside South Africa. Web of Science and Scopus are particularly relevant for our analysis as the majority of research published by academics and researchers affiliated with South African universities is published in journals that are part of these two bibliometric indexes (DHET 2023).

Similar trends are evident in the case of smaller IBSS and Norwegian lists, which, too, are dominated by journals based in the Global North. Journals from the Global South make up 10.56% of journals in IBSS, while the Norwegian list has a mere 0.18% of journals from the Global South. The IBSS has only 29 African journals, 26 of which are based in South Africa, and the Norwegian Register does not have any Level 2 or “high quality” journals from Africa. The DOAJ list is the only relatively globally diverse list of journals in the DHET’s lists of accredited journals. The Global South is represented in the DOAJ with 50.62% of journals, with 10 countries from the Global South represented in the top 20 countries. While the DOAJ list provides an important link with the Global South, the African continent remains largely absent from this directory, as it is similarly absent in other international indexes discussed above. When South African journals are excluded, journals from other African countries represent only 1.12% of the journals indexed in the DOAJ.

Overall, the overwhelming domination of the journals from the Global North in the case of the Web of Science, Scopus, IBSS and the Norwegian list provides a limited opportunity for academics and researchers affiliated with South African universities to publish in journals based in the Global South. Only the DOAJ list provides such an opportunity. When it comes to the African journals, the DHET’s choice of international indexes and directories provides hardly any opportunity for South African scholars to publish in journals based on the African continent, as publishing in journals that are not part of the DHET lists automatically disqualifies institutions and authors from receiving research subsidies from the government. This way, the DHET is directly undermining African journals and platforms by disincentivising South African scholars from engaging with them. This undermines many African journals (Asubiaro and Onaolapo 2023) and numerous knowledge platforms outside South Africa. This is also contrary to the policy rhetoric since the end of apartheid and the calls for the expansion of collaboration with the African continent and the promotion and advancement of scholarly research with other African countries.

The DHET’s promotion of international indexes dominated largely by academic journals from the Global North cannot be understood outside the broader lack of epistemic transformation and decolonisation within the country’s public higher education system since 1994 (Heleta 2018; Heleta and Jithoo 2023a; Mbembe 2016; Modiri 2021). The DHET’s maintenance of bibliometric coloniality is a manifestation and perpetuation of the unequal geopolitical relationship that South Africa has had and

continues to have with the Global North. This uneven relationship began with the Dutch and British settler colonialism, continued during apartheid, and transformed into coloniality when the country became a democracy in 1994 (Heleta 2018; Mbembe 2016; Modiri 2021). Instead of focusing on decolonisation and redress, the post-1994 landscape embraced the neoliberalisation of public services such as higher education, where universities were defunded by the state and asked to commercialise and compete in a “free” market economy for their survival (Heleta 2023). Part of this entailed playing the “global knowledge economy” game, with the hope to gain legitimacy and acceptance from the Global North. Kamola (2012, 200) points out that the global knowledge economy is a “highly asymmetrical political economy of higher education”, where colonial and neocolonial injustices, inequalities, and power relations continue to shape contemporary relations, and where the Eurocentric hegemonic canon and norms continue to dominate production and dissemination of scholarly research and knowledge. Most importantly, the notion of the global knowledge economy is part of the “hegemonic neoliberal capitalist-driven globalisation” dominated by countries in the Global North (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021, 78).

The Global North’s domination of scholarly knowledge platforms is aimed at universalisation and globalisation of knowledge and research produced by scholars and institutions in the Global North, while at the same time marginalising the platforms and scholarship developed in the Global South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021). As Mills et al. (2023, 2) point out, policy choices of African governments force academics and scholars to negotiate a “global knowledge system dominated by ‘Northern’ journals and global publishing conglomerates” instead of building, strengthening, and/or promoting platforms on the African continent and in the Global South. As noted above, the DHET’s policy choices, combined with financial incentives, compel researchers and academics to seek recognition and credibility from the journals in the Global North, most of which exclude African scholars from their structures. This way, the DHET is intentionally supporting the “colonial model of knowledge extraction” (Bol et al. 2023) from Africa and the Global South for the benefit of the institutions, publishers, and corporates from the Global North.

Challenging and dismantling bibliometric coloniality in South Africa and elsewhere is part of the broader struggle for decolonisation of knowledge and epistemic justice and plurality. Epistemic decolonisation “entails a political and normative ethic and practice of resistance and intentional undoing—unlearning and dismantling unjust practices, assumptions, and institutions—as well as persistent positive action to create and build alternative spaces, networks, and ways of knowing that transcend our epicolonial inheritance” (Kessi, Marks, and Ramugondo 2020, 271). A key demand of the scholars calling for decolonisation of knowledge is to de-provincialise knowledge and knowledge platforms from colonial and neocolonial capture. This includes dismantling of Euro-American epistemic hegemony and fundamentalism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021) and ending the domination of scholarly platforms by institutions, scholars, and corporates largely based in Europe and North America (Bol et al. 2023). Only this way

can epistemic justice and pluralism be achieved. As highlighted by Abimbola (2023), strengthening existing or building new knowledge platforms in Africa and the broader Global South is part of the process aimed at repairing what European colonialism has destroyed over the past few centuries. This process is also aimed at challenging and dismantling the oppressive status quo maintained by the ongoing coloniality of knowledge.

Strengthening existing scholarly publishing infrastructure and developing new scholarly indexes and platforms must be a key item on the agenda of higher education ministries, science bodies, and academies on the African continent and elsewhere in the Global South (ASSAf 2019; Asubiaro and Onaolapo 2023; Collyer 2018; Mills et al. 2023). In South Africa, however, it is unclear whether this has been seriously considered by policymakers and research and higher education stakeholders until now. While the ministerial committee for the review of the funding of South African universities highlighted transformation in higher education and knowledge production as key priority areas in the quest to advance socio-economic development in South Africa, on the African continent, and elsewhere in the world, the report did not contain any transformative recommendations when it comes to broadening the accredited bibliometric platforms to include journals from the African continent outside South Africa or elsewhere in the Global South (DHET 2013a). Similarly, recommendations from Mouton et al. (2019) to the DHET about the expansion of the DHET's lists have only included the addition of two Europe-based lists. They did not consider the need to expand the lists and include indexes or platforms from the African continent or other parts of the Global South. On the other hand, the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) (2019) has recommended to the DHET to collaborate with the continental counterparts and the African Union on the creation of an African scholarly index using the SciELO SA model. However, it is unclear whether this was considered by the DHET, or whether any engagements and work on this have taken place until now.

While the African continent does not have a comprehensive continental knowledge platform or an index of African journals (Asubiaro and Onaolapo 2023), it is important to highlight that African and Global South knowledge platforms and journals exist. SciELO is an example of a Global South platform, while the African Journals Online (AJOL) is an example from the African continent. AJOL and other platforms in Africa often operate under challenging financial circumstances and with hardly any support from African governments (Mills et al. 2023). Abimbola (2023) argues that the African continent and the rest of the Global South need to provincialise the Euro-American-centric indexes and platforms, while at the same time building, strengthening, and promoting African and other Global South platforms. This article and analysis are part of the process of provincialisation of these platforms; as our analysis shows, Scopus, Web of Science, IBSS, and the Norwegian list are not international indexes or lists; they are Euro-American hegemonic platforms that aim to maintain global coloniality of knowledge. These lists and indexes systemically erase the African continent and much of the Global South. Only the DOAJ is a relatively globally diverse list within the

DHET's list of accredited journals, but even the DOAJ sidelines and neglects the African continent.

As SciELO presents a model for an African and a broader Global South scholarly index, we unpack it here in more detail. SciELO was established in 1997 in Brazil and has over the years expanded to include several countries in South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa. This is an open access e-platform for indexing academic research and increasing global visibility of the scholarship from the countries and journals that participate in it (ASSAf 2019). SciELO aims to provide visibility to the scholarship from the developing world that the Global North-based indexes often exclude (SciELO SA n.d. "About this Site"). The platform is based on international co-operation between participating countries, where they jointly work on promoting technical standards for quality academic publishing. Key objectives of SciELO are democratisation of scholarly knowledge and promotion of bibliometric diversity (Packer 2020), as opposed to bibliometric coloniality and the Euro-American hegemony of most commercial and academic indexes based in the Global North.

ASSAf (2019, 31) notes that SciELO has become "the most promising multinational journal indexing and publishing model in the developing world", providing opportunities for South-South research collaboration across the participating national networks. Currently, the SciELO (n.d. "Collections") network includes 15 countries (12 in Latin America, as well as South Africa, Spain, and Portugal). One region (West Indies) and one country (Venezuela) are in the process of joining at the time of writing. Apart from national platforms, SciELO also has a Public Health collection of journals. The SciELO website features all participating national journal collections; this way, the journals that are part of each SciELO country platform are given global visibility. SciELO follows strict quality controls through the journal evaluation and accreditation processes, aiming to feature only quality national journals in participating countries (ASSAf 2019; Packer 2020).

SciELO South Africa emerged after the recommendation by the Academy of Science of South Africa to the DHET in 2006 to establish a platform for "quality-controlled and government-supported publication of open access journals of sufficient quality to deliver local impact and international recognition" (ASSAf 2019, 28). At this time, ASSAf proposed to model the South African platform on the already existing SciELO platform in use across Latin America. SciELO South Africa became operational in 2009, and it became a fully certified platform within the SciELO global network in 2013 (ASSAf 2019). As highlighted by ASSAf (2019, 133), there is a plan within the SciELO structures to expand beyond the current member countries and become a scholarly index of the Global South, leading to a "significant rebalancing of the world knowledge system". Similarly, within the SciELO SA structures, there is an aspiration to expand the local platform and include other African countries, creating a continental scholarly platform or index. The development of the West Indian regional SciELO platform, mentioned above, can serve as a model for the creation of the African platform.

Expansion of the SciELO network to include other African countries requires financial and technical commitment from each country, as well as the involvement of national research bodies and higher education systems and institutions, and adoption of quality and other protocols (Packer 2020). For this, there is a need for political commitment, financial investment, and collaboration and engagement between ministries responsible for higher education, science and research, academies of science, research bodies, and higher education systems and institutions across the continent. Finally, as all countries within the SciELO network follow the same technical and quality protocols for assessment and addition of journals to national SciELO platforms, it is surprising that the DHET has not yet included the entire SciELO global network in its lists of accredited journals. This would add the bibliometric diversity from the Global South and be an important act that directly tackles bibliometric coloniality in South Africa.

Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

In this exploratory article, we presented the analysis of the geographic coverage of the five Europe-based bibliometric indexes and directories that are part of the DHET's lists of accredited journals. This allowed us to get a clear picture of the bibliometric coloniality in South Africa, maintained and propagated by the DHET's policies and prescriptions. Our analysis shows that the DHET's lists propagate and value journals based in the Global North as credible and relevant platforms for dissemination of knowledge, while neglecting and sidelining the African continent and much of the Global South. We also engaged in a critical discussion of the reasons for the DHET's contribution to the maintenance of bibliometric coloniality, and the implications of the DHET's policies for the decolonial project and the broader intra-Africa and South-South research collaboration.

One of the main building blocks that shape the “global knowledge economy” are academic publishers, journals, and indexes, which act as gatekeepers and validators of what counts as relevant and credible scholarship (Soler, Erdocia, and Savski 2023). In South Africa, the gatekeeper is also the DHET through its decisions determining which platforms for publication of scholarly output are credible and valuable; this, in turn, decides which scholarly output is worthy of receiving research subsidies from the government. Over the past three decades, the DHET and South African academia have been co-opted by the dominant neoliberal and Euro-American logics and dogmas, promoting corporate and academic platforms and agendas based in and controlled by the corporate interests, countries, and institutions in the Global North, while sidelining, neglecting, and erasing the platforms on the African continent and much of the Global South. This way, the South African government, universities, and academia have contributed to the maintenance of bibliometric coloniality.

Dismantling bibliometric coloniality and strengthening knowledge infrastructures outside the corporate and neocolonial “core” are key in the quest to decolonise knowledge and promote epistemic plurality in South Africa and elsewhere on the African continent and in the Global South. South Africa, Africa's largest producer of

scholarly research, has a responsibility to move beyond the rhetoric about epistemic decolonisation and lead the process of dismantling the Global North's hegemony, coloniality of knowledge, and bibliometric coloniality. Working closely with other African countries and the African Union on the creation of an African scholarly index using the SciELO platform model already established in South Africa would be the first step in this process. However, one of the major barriers to epistemic decolonisation in South Africa is the lack of political will to drive and implement systemic and structural changes that are needed (Maringe and Ojo 2017; Modiri 2021). This is evident in the case of the DHET's lists of accredited journals and the department's propagation of indexes from the Global North that neglect and erase much of the world. Instead of working with other countries in Africa and elsewhere in the Global South to challenge and dismantle the historical and contemporary inequalities, inequities, and injustices in knowledge production and to build, strengthen, and promote African and Global South knowledge platforms, South Africa seems content with playing the "role of a sub-imperial accessory to the imperial ambitions" of the Global North (Maringe and Ojo 2017, 38).

Progressive students, academics, scholars, and journals must play a critical and vocal role in challenging and dismantling the status quo, the Euro-American epistemic hegemony, neoliberalisation of higher education, and bibliometric coloniality in South Africa and elsewhere. One way to tackle bibliometric coloniality is for progressive scholars and academics to stop publishing in the DHET-accredited journals and instead engage with African and Global South journals that offer liberatory, decolonial, and emancipatory spaces for thinking about the world and their fields of study. This would allow for more collaboration with parts of the world that have been neglected by South African academia over the past decades (Heleta and Jithoo 2023a). However, this would mean they would risk promotions and progress when it comes to their careers. They would also lose key research funding that comes in the form of DHET subsidies. Similarly, progressive South African journals can challenge the Global North's oppressive, exploitative, and hegemonic academic publishing practices through the promotion of critical, decolonial, and liberatory scholarship and co-creation of academic publishing platforms and networks with similar journals elsewhere in Africa and the Global South. While these acts may be considered by some individuals and journals as part of epistemic disobedience that challenges the status quo and bibliometric coloniality, the changes that are needed are systemic and structural, and they would require changes on the DHET and institutional levels, and not primarily on the individual level (Soler, Erdocia, and Savski 2023).

While this article contributes to critical unpacking of the DHET's complicity and calls for challenging bibliometric coloniality in South Africa, further research is needed on this topic. More qualitative and policy research is needed on the reasons for the DHET's policy choices regarding what it sees as quality and credible academic knowledge platforms. Future research should critically review institutional research policies and strategies of South African universities, examining what types of research output they

recognise and reward, and in what way they either challenge or accept the DHET's research policies and prescriptions that have entrenched bibliometric coloniality in the country. In-depth case study research is needed to explore how progressive academic journals from South Africa and other parts of the Global South operate in the academic publishing space dominated by commercial and academic entities from the Global North. These journals often have to “play the game” and be indexed in these large commercial indexes to achieve global visibility, but continue to promote progressive and critical scholarship and epistemic decolonisation, while also leading by example in terms of editorial board membership diversity. In addition, research should examine whether South Africa's dominant economic and academic actors use structural and other forms of pressure on the government to maintain the status quo and epistemic and bibliometric coloniality. More critical analysis is needed on international indexes, their criteria for inclusion or exclusion of journals, and the reasons for neglect of much of the world. Finally, additional research is needed on the appropriate critical and decolonial practices required to challenge and uproot bibliometric coloniality that feeds from the undying presence of imperialism and colonialism through coloniality, in knowledge production, higher education, and all other spheres of life. When this is left unchecked, it can disempower the political willingness to think and prioritise differently and bring about the redress that is needed; it can negate the agitation for alternative imaginations; and indeed, it can completely annihilate the purposeful conviction to action.

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